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# Family farming in the global countryside

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## Abstract

This paper examines the pressures on family farms from globalisation and the adaptation strategies that have been adopted. Employing a relational approach to understanding the emergent “global countryside”, the paper describes the impact of globalisation in terms of the stretching, substitution and severing of the social and economic relations that constitute the entity of the “family farm”, requiring adaptations in the strategies of family farmers. It proceeds to outline some of the strategies adopted, including entrepreneurial engagement with global networks, international mobility and resistance. These are then illustrated through short case studies drawing on qualitative and ethnographic research with “globally engaged farmers”.

**KEYWORDS:** Family farm, globalisation, adaptation, mobility, resistance

## Introduction

The family farm is an icon of the Western countryside. It embodies the disaggregated character of traditional agriculture in Europe and the European-style farming regions of North America, Australia and New Zealand, with production dispersed among millions of small, independent private farmers, as well as the distinctive social, labour and gender relations on which European-style agriculture was constructed (Gasson & Errington 1993; Gray 1998; Hill 1993). Moreover, the family farm symbolises the perceived independence, autonomy and resilience of small farmers, and the intricate meshing of work and family life, and of place and production, captured in Gray’s (1998) notion of consubstantiality. Furthermore, these values are regarded as representative not only of farmers, but of rural people and communities more broadly, such that the family farm is commonly upheld as emblematic of a traditional ‘rural way of life’ that is venerated in national and regional cultures.

However, the values and practices associated with the family farm appear to be increasingly anachronistic against the tide of rural modernisation and globalisation. The global integration of the agri-food system has favoured mass, industrial and corporatised agricultural production, with a footloose approach to sourcing produce that has overridden conventional agricultural geographies. These processes have placed economic pressures on family farms, often with terminal effect, and the number of family farms has plummeted in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America (de Raymond 2013; Johnsen 2004). Nevertheless, many family farms have survived, and in some cases are thriving.

In this paper, I explore the resilience of family farms in the face of globalisation. I start by outlining some of the challenges presented to family farms by the globalisation of agriculture, adopting a relational perspective on globalisation that crucially allows for rural actors to have the capacity to influence and shape globalisation outcomes. Accordingly, the paper then focuses on three strategies that have been adopted by family farmers as responses to globalisation. First, entrepreneurial engagement with global networks, especially through the development of new niche export markets, as exemplified by ‘globally engaged’ farmers in Australia. Second, the international mobility of family farmers who have relocated their farms to different countries that offer a more advantageous position in the global agri-food system. Third, acts of resistance by family farmers who have participated in protest movements against pressures that are directly or indirectly the products of globalisation.

This paper draws on a range of research projects that I have been involved in over the last decade. These include research funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) on Grassroots rural protest and political activity in Britain, which examined farmers’ protests via semi-structured interviews and documentary research; the Globally Engaged Farmers? project led by Lynda Cheshire and funded by the Australian Research Council, which examined the engagement of farmers in Australia with global networks, including in-depth ethnographic interviews with selected farmers; research funded by the University of Wales Aberystwyth Research Fund on Contesting the Global Countryside: Policy responses and political reactions to globalisation in rural economies and societies, which included documentary research and interviews with farmers in Australia and New Zealand; and initial desk-top and online documentary research for GLOBAL-RURAL, a current European Research Council project.

## **Family farming and the challenges of globalisation**

Although the idea of the “family farm” is prominent in popular culture, its definition as a social or economic concept can be problematic. The convergence of family and farm is not as precise as it perhaps once was historically: many farm households include family members who work off the farm and children who have no interest in taking over the farm business, and conversely there are many family farms with partners, managers and employees who are not family members. Neither are family farms necessarily distinct from other types of farms in their business models or practices. Many family farms are small in scale, but some family-owned farm business can be quite extensive and involve multiple holdings; equally, not all small farms are family units. Moreover, almost all farms in the western world, whether large or small, family- or non-family, are capitalist enterprises, engaged in producing commodities for the market.

Attempts to more closely define family farms have been made by a number of authors, with varying emphases. Gasson and Errington (1993) placed emphasis on ownership, identifying six elements that they argued define family farms and can be observed in practice: business ownership is combined with managerial control in the hands of business principals; these principals are related by kinship or marriage; family members provide capital to the business; family members including business principals do farm work; business

ownership and managerial control are transferred between generations with the passage of time; and the family lives on the farm. This definition was, however, criticised by Hill (1993) for its focus on ownership and capital injection, with Hill alternatively proposing a typology based on labour that contrasted family farms, where unpaid family labour contributes most or all of the work on the farm, with intermediate farms that have significant paid hired labour, and non-family farms where most work is undertaken by hired labour.

Furthermore, Gray (1998) criticised all these above definitions for being externally constructed, and instead sought to identify the essence of a family farm as understood and performed by the farmer, through anthropological research on Scottish hill farms. Through this study, Gray highlights the interdependency of the farm on the family, but also the family on the farm; the embodiment of the ties between family and farm in physical labour; and the emotional importance of keeping the farm in the family through inheritance. He also observes that family farmers see themselves as a group apart, and that they frequently employ a “genetic metaphor” that suggests that distinctive attributes are “bred into” farming families in the same way that livestock are modified through breeding to fit their environment. As such, Gray argues that ‘the family farm is more a way of being-in-the-world than a specific set of people, relations and/or activities, whose boundaries can be precisely defined’ (1998: 355).

Gray’s thesis resonates with further studies in New Zealand by Dominy (2001) and Moran et al. (1993) that again emphasise the coincidence of enterprise and household on family farms and their embeddedness in place; as well as with Donovan’s (2001) description of the “intimate geography of family farms” in Kenya. These representations of the family farm as more than a business model help to explain the iconic status afforded to family farms, and why protection of family farms has been prioritised in rural policy in many countries (especially in Europe) with a degree of emphasis that is disproportionate to their contribution to the rural economy. They also help to reveal the vulnerabilities of family farms in the context of modernisation and globalisation, and their capacity for resilience.

The resilience of family farms and the ideas that they embody have been tested by the related, but separate, processes of modernisation and globalisation. The pursuit of the modernisation paradigm in rural development policy during the second half of the twentieth century has been manifested in agriculture by mechanisation and the introduction of agri-chemicals and other technologies (Woods 2011). These innovations have automated or replaced tasks on the farm that were previously typically undertaken by farm women and children, thus reducing the requirement for family labour and reconfiguring gender roles on the farm. Furthermore, whilst the overall need for hired labour has been reduced by modernisation, certain tasks have increasingly been contracted out to independent operators with specialist machinery hired in to help with activities such as harvesting. Through such measures, modernisation increased the productive capacity of farms, but its benefits were most effectively realised on larger farm units. As such, farms have been expanded or amalgamated, in some cases involving the setting-up of business partnerships that are no longer tied to a single family. At the same time, the inheritance of farms through the family has been disrupted by social modernisation, with farm children pursuing new alternative career opportunities and choosing not to take-over the farm (see for instance Kuehne 2013).

Modernisation improved the productivity of family farms and in many cases increased their income. However, the required investment in new machinery and technology was commonly funded through bank loans, and rising indebtedness made family farms vulnerable to fluctuations in economic conditions (Le Heron 1993). This became starkly evident in the United States in the early 1980s when a period of high interest rates coincided with a collapse in commodity prices, leading thousands of family farms to default on their debts. Over the course of a decade, up to 300,000 mostly family farms disappeared (Dudley 2000; Woods 2005a).

The position of family farms had, therefore, been weakened by the drive of modernisation, commonly sponsored by national government policies, even before they became increasingly exposed to the winds of globalisation from around the 1980s onwards. Whilst modernisation altered the internal dynamics of family farms, globalisation has reshaped their external relations, including ties to place. To see this, it is most helpful to adopt a relational perspective on globalisation, which understands it as the intensification, stretching, substitution and severing of social and economic relations over space (Massey 2005; Steger 2003; Woods 2007). Thus, the agri-food system has been globalised through the intensification in the volume of international trade in agricultural commodities; by the stretching of agricultural commodity chains and supply networks over longer distances; by the creation of new relations and connections as new technologies are introduced, new corporate actors established and new markets opened up; and by the severing of older relations as production networks are restructured, for example through the closure of regional food processing plants. Collectively, these dynamics of agri-food globalisation present challenges to family farms in three main ways.

Firstly, as market controls have been deregulated and commodity chains stretched, family farms have found themselves undercut on price for their produce, even in local markets, by imports that are able to benefit from cheaper sites of production and economies of scale. Secondly, family farms have become increasingly dependent on transnational corporations as both suppliers and customers as a limited number of corporations have come to dominate both in upstream markets for seed, chemicals and biotechnology, and downstream in the retail sector. The disparity in power between a larger single buyer such as a supermarket chain and the disparate collection of small family farm suppliers means that family farms have found themselves repeatedly squeezed on the price that they receive for commodities such as milk, in some cases below the cost of production. Thirdly, the financial viability of many family farms has also been undermined by the reduction or withdrawal of government subsidies and other support mechanisms as part of neoliberal reforms aimed at removing perceived barriers to global competition. Such reforms were pioneered in Australia and New Zealand in the 1980s, with the sudden withdrawal of farm subsidies forcing family farms to change their business practices or sell-up (Cloeke & Le Heron 1994; Johnsen 2004; Pritchard et al. 2007). An estimated 40,000 farms consequently closed down in Australia over the two decades to 1998 (Lockie 2000).

However, headlines about farm closures and the anticipated death of the family farm risk both overstating the pre-determination of globalisation outcomes and understat-

ing the adaptability of family farms. Relational theories of globalisation reject the notion that globalisation is imposed from the top-down, and instead hold that it is reproduced through local places (Massey 2005; Woods 2007). As such, local actors have the capacity to influence the outcomes of globalisation, by capturing, manipulating, resisting and subverting global networks and processes, and by initiating their own global connections. Woods (2007), thus describes the emergent ‘global countryside’ as a hybrid space, produced by the adaptations and compromises of both local and non-local actors. Equally, the definition of the family farm as a “way of life”, rather than as a taxonomic model dictated by ownership or labour characteristics, affords family farmers the capacity to change in response to the challenges that they face.

Johnsen (2004) thus documents adjustment strategies adopted by family farmers in New Zealand who rode out the convulsions that followed neoliberal reforms in the 1980s. These included diversification into alternative commodities and non-agricultural entrepreneurial activities; reduction of enterprise-related expenditure and household consumption, and in the use of paid labour; closer monitoring of financial markets and adoption of more strategic business practices; adoption of low-input physical farm practices; and changes in farm size. As Johnsen notes, these adaptations altered the nature of family farming, including an uncoupling of enterprise, household and property, but they did not mean the end of family farming:

Waihemo farms were not “going the way of the automobile” ... in the way implied by subsumption school advocates, as farm ownership and managerial control still lay in the hands of family members ... While the majority could still be deemed family farms in the 1990s in that they fulfilled most (if not all) the ‘essential criteria’ identified by theorists, it appears that the contingent features of family farming are indeed evolving in significant ways (2004: 429).

Pritchard et al. (2004) similarly record the evolution of a new category of “farm family entrepreneurs” in Australia, who have responded to neoliberal reforms by adopting legal and financial structures characteristic of more mainstream corporate enterprises, but in which family units remain at the social and economic heart of farm ownership and operation.

The remaining sections of this paper explore further the responses of family farms, specifically to the challenges and opportunities presented by globalisation, focusing in turn on strategies of entrepreneurship, migration and resistance.

## **Entrepreneurship and global engagement**

Diversification of farm activities has been a typical response of family farmers to domestic and international pressures on their traditional core business. Often this has meant shifting all or part of production to another mainstream commodity that offers a better financial return, with examples of farmers moving from sheep to dairy or beef cattle in New Zealand (Johnsen 2004), or from dairy to field crops in northern France (de Raymond 2013). A few farmers have shifted more dramatically to new and exotic crops or livestock, such as deer in New Zealand and llamas in Britain, hoping to receive premium prices from

niche markets. More commonly, farmers have pursued premiums by changing their farming methods, for example adopting organic agriculture or returning to local 'rare breeds', or by branding and marketing their produce as regional specialities, including through various protected origin schemes. At the same time, many family farmers have diversified their household income away from a reliance on agriculture, either through members of the family taking on off-farm work, or by developing new non-agricultural activities on the farm, such as tourism. By 1997, the typical farm family in the United States was earning 88 per cent of its income from off-farm sources (Johnson 2001); whilst in England, 58 per cent of farms received off-farm income in 1997–98 (Woods 2005a). Johnsen (2004) reports that 67 per cent of family farms studied in the Waihemo district of New Zealand were *pluriactive*, i.e. involved in various non-agricultural income-generating activities.

Diversification usually involves some degree of entrepreneurial activity by the farmer or a member of their household, but in most cases this remains relatively limited. Diversification is adopted as a survival strategy, not as a business growth strategy. Farmers moving into new commodities still tend to sell to traders, supermarkets and food processing companies, and are not responsible for marketing the final product. Those who do move into direct sales (on-farm or at a farmers' market, for example) and those who develop new on-farm businesses such as tourist accommodation, tend still to rely on local advertising and local sales, and are not interested in growing large businesses.

There are, however, some farmers who are exceptions, who do prioritise business growth and who have started to adopt the practices and modes of operation of larger corporations whilst remaining at core family enterprises. Pritchard et al. (2007) identify this group as 'farm family entrepreneurs' and observe their operation within the tomato-growing sector in Australia (cf. Magnan 2012 on "One Earth Farms" in Canada). It is members of this group who are most likely to see globalisation not (or not only) as a threat to their family farm but as an opportunity to develop new products and new markets. Whereas the involvement of family farmers in international export markets has tended to be mediated by agencies, intervention boards, traders and processing companies, this emergent group of "globally-engaged farmers" commonly seek to build international business relationships themselves, dealing directly with customers, or drawing on international networks for capital investment, specialist equipment and biotechnology, specialist labour and knowledge exchange (Cheshire & Woods 2013).

The most proactive and ambitious globally-engaged farmers are those who have elected to bypass intermediary agents and are selling their farm produce directly to customers in other countries, often spending considerable time travelling internationally to broker deals and meet with customers (Cheshire & Woods 2013). These farmers represent a very small and exceptional cohort within agriculture, and are arguably concentrated in states that have introduced the most radical degrees of deregulation and exposure to global markets, such as Australia, but they nonetheless provide an interesting case of family farmers taking on globalisation on their own terms.

Examples of globally-engaged farmers identified by research in Australia include (all names are pseudonyms) (see also Cheshire & Woods 2013; Cheshire et al. 2013; Cheshire et al. 2014): Tim Reid, who diversified his family's traditional business in apple-growing

(which was under pressure from competition from imports from New Zealand) into growing Japanese sweet cherries and selling these directly to high-class restaurants and hotels in Japan; Jim Stone, who found new markets for his farm by exporting hay, and now sells to over 20 countries, notably Japan, South Korea and Taiwan; Malcolm Shand, one of Australia's largest wheat farmers, who circumvented the wheat export board to sell directly to customers in Japan, Vietnam and Thailand; Colin Dunne, who started exporting durum wheat to Italy for pasta production before experimenting with pasta-making himself and now exports pasta to countries including Dubai, the United States, Japan, Singapore and the United Kingdom; Michael Gale, whose fruit-farming family established a joint venture to export fruit, with specific brands targeted at the European and Asian markets; and Elizabeth Fife, who diversified activities on her husband's wheat and sheep farm to breed and export crayfish to Europe, Asia, North America and the Middle East.

Not all globally-engaged farmers are engaged in direct exports; some have supported their businesses through other forms of international engagement. Brian Scott, for example, was motivated by market pressures faced by his vegetable farm to become active in his sector's representative body, eventually becoming a leader of the international association and through the connections he developed investing in a joint venture farm in Ukraine and joining the advisory board for an agricultural project in Ethiopia. Others have travelled to acquire knowledge about different techniques, technologies and markets to support their farm's development. Vegetable farmer Gary Penfold, for instance, used a Nuffield Scholarship to travel to South and North America, Europe and New Zealand, studying soil and plant interaction and the concept of "fusion farming"; whilst Jennifer Dawson, whose family farm raises cattle for live export, also used a Nuffield Scholarship to follow the processing of livestock imported into Indonesia and the Middle East for halal meat production and to visit animal welfare NGOs opposed to the live export trade to gain a better understanding of the global context in which her family farm operates.

Significantly, whilst many of these individuals are now running substantial businesses and have schedules that resemble those of transnational business executives, most continue to identify themselves as farmers, and most continue to be involved in some way with farm work (Cheshire & Woods 2013), as they described in interviews:

I used to be embarrassed to say that I was a farmer, when I was young, when you're chasing women or going out or whatever. You used to feel that that was detrimental to say that you were a farmer. But I'm now proud of it. I think it's a good, honourable profession that we shouldn't shirk away from. So although I could put 'businessman' or something like that at the bottom of any forms when I'm going through the airport, I always put 'farmer' (Ben Parsons, poultry farmer, interview).

This identity as an Australian farmer was routinely performed by some of the farmers through their style of dress when travelling. Photographs of the farmers in overseas locations revealed that, when operating in international spaces, their presentation of themselves as involved a hybrid of culturally-appropriate clothing with a distinctly Australian style, for example wearing bush hats.



Of the nineteen farmers interviewed in depth for the globally-engaged farmers project, thirteen were working their family farm. Among these, Alex Donaldson is a fourth generation wheat farmer in a region where his family has farmed since the early 1900s; Jennifer Dawson is the fifth generation to live and work on her family cattle farm in Western Australia; Ben Parsons took over his family farm when his parents retired; Gary Penfold runs his family farm in partnership with other family members, all of whom live on the property in separate houses; Elizabeth Fife's farm has been in her husband's family for three generations. For these individuals, maintaining the family farm is a strong motivation for entrepreneurial activity and global engagement:

You know I would hate the fact that this whole property would not be in our family anyway. It would be horrible, it would tear you to pieces. Even if it's not me living right here, that's okay – but the thought of the whole business being disposed of and the whole family moving on – yes that would be weird. (Jennifer Dawson, cattle farmer, interview).

We keep farming because apart from it would be really hard to sell when something has been in the family this long. Our daughters don't want to see the farm sold because it's their home and that is not a practicality, it is not very business-like (Elizabeth Fife, farmer, interview).

Others, however, have taken a more pragmatic approach, being prepared to sell their family property to invest in a new site in which to grow their business, but not without emotional pressures. Fruit farmer Paul Brown, who sold his inherited farm in a valley where his family had farmed since 1860 to buy a new property in a neighbouring district, recounted how the decision made be easier by his grandfather's warning not to become too attached to a particular property:

Yeah, it was a very difficult thing to do for me, to sell the land. A sort of sentimental attachment over all those years. I would not have been able to do it if it hadn't been for my grandfather telling me 40 years ago that I should never become attached to the asset of the land. He said one day it will all be yours to manage and don't stay here and go broke. If you think you're not going to – just never become attached the asset. You can always sell the land and go – if you think you can do something better, it's really your duty to go and go and do it. You know, get rid of it (Paul Brown, fruit farmer, interview).

These cases point to a different understanding of the practice of family farming to that often described in the literature, in which the continuation of a family business, or ongoing involvement with farming as practice may be more important than attachment to a specific place (see Cheshire et al. 2013), and in which farm migration may become part of a survival strategy. This approach is explored further in the next section.

## **International farm migration**

The conventional literature on family farming has emphasised a strong attachment to place. Farmers, it is supposed, have a more organic and specific connection to land, as a resource that they work with, not just an asset or property (Salamon 2003), and thus come to know and understand the landscape and ecology of their farm intimately (Morris 2006, 2010; Riley 2008; Tsouvalis et al. 2000). As an inheritance, passed down from generation to generation, the farm is the repository of family history (Riley & Harvey 2007), an heirloom and an obligation (Hildenbrand & Hennon 2005). As both a place of work and a home, the family farm is the source of the family's income (Flemsæter 2009), yet it is 'not just an economic and social entity, but also a physical space invested with socio-cultural meaning, much of which is embodied in material and symbolic phenomena, such as land and stock' (Johnsen 2003: 132). Gray (1998) introduces the concept of consubstantiality to describe this intricate coincidence of life, work and place, and notes that farmers in his case study of the Scottish Borders evoked a genetic metaphor that implied that farming families evolved to suit their livestock in much the same way as animals, thus infusing and enabling 'a consubstantial relation between and a family and a farm' (Gray 1998: 346).

These assertions arguably overstate the spatial fixity of family farms. The globally engaged farmers studied Australia, though not a typical group, included several who had moved properties without necessarily feeling that they had broken the continuity of the family farm. In one case, the same farm name was given the family's property even as they moved between three different states. Accordingly, Cheshire et al. (2013) propose an alternative way of thinking about farmer attachments that involves decoupling the elements of attachment to farming as an activity and identity, attachment to a farm business, and attachment to a particular property or place. Maintaining one of these attachments may mean sacrificing another.

All but one of the farmers in the Australian study that had moved properties had done so within Australia, although some of the distances involved would have implied international moves in other geographical contexts (the one exception was a farmer who had relocated to Australia from South Africa). In some cases, the moves were relatively local and reflected the complex implications of the patrilinear nature of farm inheritance: individuals had bought new farms whilst their parents were still farming the original property, or because an elder sibling had inherited the family farm, or because the family farm had been sold and proceeds used by siblings to buy their own properties. These dynamics, all of which preserve the family tradition of farming, are not uncommon or restricted to Australia. Furthermore, the very presence of European farmers in Australia is a reminder that international migration by farmers was once common and substantial. During the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thousands of European farmers migrated to North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, often settling in places with similar climatic conditions to home so that they could continue the same type of agriculture, in effect re-establishing their family farm abroad, often with the same farm or place name.

It should perhaps not therefore be surprising that some family farmers have responded to the challenges of contemporary globalisation in the same way as agribusiness and other non-agricultural businesses by adopting a "footloose strategy" and relocating to

a more cost-effective site of production in another region or country. This is a relatively under-researched phenomenon, and it is difficult to ascertain the scale of such migrations; however, studies and anecdotal evidence point to three notable patterns.

First, the single market in the European Union and the broadly equivalent support from the Common Agricultural Policy in member states has encouraged some farmers to relocate to other countries within the EU with lower land and labour costs, higher commodity prices, or more favourable regulations. Farmers from Austria, Britain, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain and especially France have reportedly invested in Romania since it joined the EU in 2007, attracted by low land prices and weaker regulations (Bran 2012). Bran quotes one French farmer migrant commenting that ‘to achieve what I’ve done here in the past three years would have taken several generations in France. There you’re always up against the state and the initial outlay is colossal,’ and another young French migrant farmer observing that ‘in western Europe there is no room for young people.... Here you can start from scratch.’ Similarly, Silvis et al. (2002) report that 317 foreign farmers had leased land in Poland by 2000, including 117 Germans, 94 Dutch, 27 Britons and 25 Danes, although some of these may have been agri-businesses rather than family farmers.

Investments by Dutch farmers in eastern Europe, especially Poland and eastern Germany, form part of a wider trend of farmer emigration from the Netherlands. In the early 2000s, around 300 farmers were recorded as emigrating from the Netherlands each year, though this has since fallen to around 100 to 130 per year, due to difficulties selling farms (Olgun 2007). Many moved a relatively short distance across the border into the neighbouring German *länder* of North Rhine Westphalia and Lower Saxony, from where they could maintain regular contact with the Netherlands, but Silvis et al. (2002) also identify around 300 Dutch farmers in eastern Germany by 2002 and around 150 in Poland, as well as smaller numbers in Spain, Portugal, France, Luxembourg, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Olgun (2007) additionally states that there were nearly 500 Dutch farmers in Denmark in 2007.

The majority of farmers relocating from the Netherlands have been dairy farmers, attracted by cheaper milk quota prices in Germany and Denmark, though there has also been a smaller movement of pig farmers, often attracted by lighter regulations. Dutch farmers have also moved to take advantage of the availability of land to expand their farms in ways that are not possible in the crowded countryside of the Netherlands (de Vries 2010; Olgun 2007; Silvis et al. 2002). In these ways, Dutch family farms have used relocation within Europe as a mechanism to secure competitive advantages in a globalising economy.

Second, there is a pattern of ex-colonial farm migration in the southern hemisphere that has been driven in part by economic factors, but also by political pressures, including land reforms in Zimbabwe and political instability in South Africa. State-sponsored seizures of white-owned farmers in Zimbabwe during the early 2000s led to up to 2,000 white farmers leaving the country, mostly for Australia and New Zealand, but also neighbouring African countries including Zambia, South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi and Nigeria. In Zambia, around 200 Zimbabwean farmers were reported to have established tobacco farms and to have contributed to a five-fold increase in Zambia’s tobacco production between 2001 and 2004 (Apps 2005; Murphy 2004).

Similarly, around 150 dairy and tobacco farmers from Zimbabwe were reported to have relocated to Mozambique (BBC News 2002; Hammar 2010). As Hammar (2010) shows, many of the displaced farmers exhibited ambivalence about their identity as Zimbabwean, but asserted their identity as farmers as they struggled with new social, economic and environmental challenges in Mozambique.

The movement of Zimbabwean farmers is mirrored, on a smaller scale and in less coercive conditions, by the relocation of white farmers from South Africa. As with Zimbabwean farmers, South African farmers have been actively courted by several other countries in Africa, who hope that they can help to drive agricultural development. In one deal, the government of Congo-Brazzaville leased 88,000 hectares of land to 70 South African farmers, with plans to make up to 10 million hectares available from abandoned state farms and bush land (Pearce 2011). As with the Zimbabwean farmer migrants, the compulsion to leave South Africa is political more than economic, but the choice of relocation site frequently reflects a desire to continue farming and assessment of opportunities for developing a successful farm business in the context of globalisation.

Third, there continues to be a small flow of migrating farmers from Europe to North America. Whilst opportunities for relocating farms to the United States are limited, Canada has actively promoted immigration by farmers from both Asia and Europe. Among the most notable groups to take advantage of this policy have again been Dutch family farmers. Nearly a quarter of Canadian farmers who are immigrants (i.e. not born in Canada) are Dutch, though most of these moved during the 1940s and 1950s (Statistics Canada, no date). The pattern was revived in the 1990s, with around 450 Dutch dairy farmers moving to the province of Ontario during the decade (Wolleswinkel and Weersink 2001), and just over 100 Dutch farmers were granted immigration permits to Canada in 2000 alone (Silvis et al. 2002). As well as Ontario, where most post-war Dutch immigrant farmers had settled, more recent arrivals have particularly settled in Alberta (Statistics Canada, no date).

A study of recent Dutch immigrant farmers in Ontario by Wolleswinkel and Weersink (2001) found that the main reasons for leaving the Netherlands included limited opportunities to expand, the high price of milk quotas, and increasing environmental legislation, whilst major reasons for selecting Ontario included the climate, soil quality, population density, the presence of other Dutch farmers, and Ontario's use of a supply management system with milk quotas, similar to that in the Netherlands, but cheaper to buy into. This factor was noted as significant in farmers' decisions to move to Canada as opposed to countries without milk quota systems such as the United States and New Zealand, emphasising a preference among migrant farmers for familiarity.

Wolleswinkel and Weersink (2001) also found that the average property farmed by the migrant farmers was 100 hectares in Ontario compared with 40 hectares before they left the Netherlands, that their cattle herds were 49 per cent larger, and that their average annual milk production was 78 per cent higher. As such, international migration has enabled the Dutch farmers to grow their farm businesses. In this, the more recent migrants have emulated the post-war Dutch farmer migrants, with Schryer (2006) arguing that the Dutch immigrants' enthusiasm for scientific knowledge and technological innovation as

well as their export orientation enabled them to achieve a competitive advantage in a global economy.

Across all these examples, farmers have shown a willingness to take advantage of the globalisation of mobility to relocate their farms to new countries, either for political reasons or to gain competitive economic benefits. They have also demonstrated a preference for familiar environments, cultures or regulatory regimes, and a core motivation of continuing family farming, either by seeking out new locations that permit them to expand their family farm and enable their children to enter farming, or concentrating on the livestock or commodities that they have always farmed without needing to diversify into side activities to survive.

## **Family farmer resistance to globalisation**

The preceding two sections have discussed examples of the proactive engagement of family farmers with opportunities presented by globalisation in order to gain competitive advantage and secure the future of their farm. This section turns to more reactionary responses, as family farmers have mobilised in protest against perceived threats to their livelihoods. Farm protests have proliferated in many parts of the world over the last three decades, as pressures on family farms have mounted, and as the political influence of family farmers has declined, but have also taken many different forms and been driven by diverse motivations. The inherent conservatism of many family farmers, entrenched perhaps by the sense of social obligation conveyed by the descriptor *family*, has fostered reluctance to participate in confrontational direct actions; however, behind headline-capturing protests there is arguably a more extensive seam of quiet resistance by farmers, enacted for example through instances of non-compliance with regulations. Furthermore, whilst the social conservatism and individualism of family farmers has in some cases led to associations with right-wing populist movements, there are also strains of progressive agrarian activism. Therefore, as demonstrated further below, as a response to globalisation and other pressures “family farmer resistance” is a deceptively simple description that belies a complex mix of political actions and movements (see also Woods 2003, 2008).

One common feature, however, is a perception of disempowerment among family farmers that has reflected the weakening of farmer influence over rural policy. In the post-war period, family farms in the global north benefited from the agricultural exceptionalism of policies to support agriculture and guarantee national food security, such as the Common Agricultural Policy in Europe. Whilst these policies promoted the industrialisation and modernisation of agriculture, they were delivered, at least initially, through the patchwork of family farms, and in some cases maintaining the incomes of individual farmers was emphasised as a specific objective. Farmers’ interests were represented in the policy communities steering such programmes by large farm unions such as the National Farmers’ Union in Britain and the Farm Bureau in the United States. Over time, however, the consequences of modernisation combined with neoliberal policy reforms that started to deregulate markets and remove farm subsidies began to squeeze smaller family farmers. At the same time, discontent with the mainstream farm unions increased, with a perception that the unions primarily reflected the interests of larger farms and agribusiness rather than family farmers (Woods forthcoming).

Accordingly, family farm protests emerged as a grassroots movement, often informally organised and sometimes spontaneously. In some cases, they coalesced into more formal organisations that formed as splinter groups from the mainstream unions: Farmers for Action in Britain, the *Confédération Paysanne* in France, the American Agriculture Movement (AAM) in the United States, the Australian Milk Producers Association (AMPA) and Concerned Dairy Farmers in Australia. The tactics employed by these groups varied, structured by available resources and opportunities (Woods forthcoming). The capacity for mass demonstrations, such as the AAM's "tractorcade" in Washington D.C. in 1978 and 1979, or rallies against neoliberal reforms in Australia in the mid-1980s, dwindled as the number of family farms contracted. Instead, more recent protests have focused on direct action. French farmers pioneered road-blocks and the hijacking of lorries carrying imported meat in the 1980s (Naylor 1994). Farm protests in Britain were ignited with spontaneous pickets of ports in 1997, and continued with road-blocks, tractor rallies and pickets of supermarkets and distribution depots (Woods 2005b). Dairy farmers in Britain, Germany and Australia have all staged 'milk-dump' protests, spreading milk on their fields rather than sending it to market in protest at prices received (though one Australian participant interviewed admitted that the milk was heavily diluted as they would not really waste good milk).

These events were commonly highly charged and emotional, reflecting the desperation of farmers in turning to them as a last resort (Woods et al. 2012). The motivation of participants was individualistic but not just economic – it was about saving the farm business, but also about saving a family inheritance and a way of life. Some of the grassroots organisations explicitly position themselves as representing family farmers in their titles, including the Family Farm Defenders and the National Family Farm Campaign in the United States, and the Small and Family Farmers Alliance in Britain. In other cases, participants conveyed the emotion and the interconnection of family and farm in interviews:

This was putting the message over that things are not good. It's as simple as that. And when things really affect you personally you can't meet your bills, you're wondering how you're going to afford to pay for food to feed your cattle, how you're going to afford to pay the rent in three months time. When you're lying in bed, the only thing that means anything to you is your family first, and secondly, you want to farm. See, people ... there's not one politician of the Labour downstairs understand that. They do not understand it's a living industry. And they do not understand how someone can be that passionate. That's all they want to do. There is young people today, they would sell their grandmother to get the first foot on the rung of agriculture. It's that passionate and you put that together with putting them with their backs to the wall as a lot of them said, "Do what you f'in' well want 'cos we ain't got nowhere to go and you can't put us in jail, or you can't summon us because we got no money to pay for it, and if you put us in jail you have to look after our dependents" (Farm protest leader, Wales, interview).

The protests have however been inconsistent in their messages and targets. As grassroots actions, they have tended to target the most immediate and visible sources of their problems: governments sometimes, but also supermarkets and, most tellingly, imports of farm produce with ports blocked and trucks ransacked (Woods 2005b, forthcoming). As such, farm protesters have attacked the symptoms of globalisation but not its drivers. Family farmer protest leaders tend to have little knowledge or understanding of globalisation, and as conservative business owners they are instinctively wary of the counter-globalisation movement, which they perceive to be anarchistic and anti-capitalist. The most prominent exception is the *Confédération Paysanne* in France, which was radicalised under the influence of ex-Greenpeace activist José Bové and which achieved global notoriety with Bové's attack on a McDonald's restaurant in 1999 as a protest against globalisation.

Elsewhere, the connections between the plight of family farmers and the transnational processes of neoliberal globalisation, or the case for solidarity among family farmers in different countries, are articulated only by a few marginal voices, such as the leader of the very small and peripheral Small and Family Farmers Alliance in Britain:

I sat down with farmers with two acres in India, and they told me about their problems, you know, prices below the cost of production. You think, well, I could get Fred Bloggs from East Anglia and sit these two down ... they will have absolutely everything in common. There's different sizes, you've got 2,000 acres and you've got two acres. But they see each other as the enemy (Leader, Small and Family Farmers Alliance).

Indeed, it is significant that the international farmers' coalition La Via Campesina, which represents family and peasant farmers in Latin America, Africa and Asia, has very few member organisations from Europe, North America or Australasia – the most notable being the *Confédération Paysanne* and the Canadian National Farmers' Union. None of the mainstream farm unions belong, nor do the most visible grassroots family farm groups in Britain, Australia or the United States. Neither have family farm activists from these countries participated in 'farmers' days of action' at World Trade Organisation or G8 summits.

Without these networks of support, the farmers' protests have been easily sidelined and have proved ineffectual. Some have briefly achieved media attention, but have not resulted in any lasting systemic changes. Ironically, perhaps, the arguably most effective action by family farmers was their involvement in blockades of fuel depots across Europe in the autumn of the year 2000, which panicked governments and had some impact on fuel taxation (Woods 2005b). This "success" was achieved in part by joining a broader alliance with truck drivers and others on an issue that enjoyed public support, but also by hitting distribution networks. In this, they stumbled on a truth of the global agri-food system: farm strikes and milk dumps fail to have an impact because retailers and processors can go elsewhere to source food products; but without fuel for distribution even supermarkets and agribusiness grind to a halt. In highlighting this weakness, family farm protesters also illuminated their own marginality.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored three different ways in which family farmers have responded to the challenges of modernisation and globalisation. In keeping with a relational perspective on globalisation, they show that family farmers are not the inevitable victims of globalisation, but that there are points within the global agri-food system where they have the potential to make a difference, or at least attempt to do so. Two of the strategies examined have involved proactive engagement with the opportunities presented by globalisation: developing new international networks to strengthen a family farm business, or moving the farm to a more competitive location in another country. The third recounted attempts to resist globalisation processes through protest, and whilst the cases discussed have been largely ineffectual, broader movements such as La Via Campesina point to the possibility of small farmers working together to construct alternatives to the neoliberal global agri-food system.

Nevertheless, the most striking feature is that all of these responses involve very few farmers: hundreds or thousands at most. The vast majority of family farmers are not engaged in any of these more radical responses, but neither are they entirely passive. Most family farmers are responding to globalisation through modest adaptations: on-farm diversification that can attract a few local or national customers; selling some produce on local markets or at the farmgate; taking on contracts to supply supermarkets that bring stability for a while but leave the farm vulnerable to corporate decision-making. For most farms, these small actions may be enough to survive – for now. In Europe, and to a lesser extent North America, the continuing cultural significance of family farms means that they have not been entirely abandoned in policy, and some support is still afforded through subsidy payments or protectionist policies (albeit repackaged to try to conform with WTO regulations), but the compromise is fragile and the future of family farms remains far from certain.

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## **Povzetek**

Članek preučuje globalizacijske pritiske na družinske kmetije globalizacije prilagoditvene strategije, ki jih kmetije izvajajo. S pomočjo relacijskega pristopa k razumevanju nastajajočega 'globalnega podeželja', članek opisuje vpliv globalizacije z vidika raztezanja, nadomeščanja in ločevanja družbenih in ekonomskih odnosov, ki tvorijo celoto 'družinske kmetije', to pa zahteva prilagodite strategij družinskih kmetov. Članek pojasnjuje nekatere sprejete strategije, vključno s podjetniškim vključevanjem v globalna omrežja, mednarodno mobilnostjo in odporom, ki so predstavljene prek kratkih študij primerov, temelječih na kvalitativnih in etnografskih raziskovanjih 'globalno dejavnih kmetov'.

**Ključne besede:** družinska kmetija, globalizacija, prilagajanje, mobilnost, odpor

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